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Antecler's Last Chant

Realistic Study of Agricultural Conditions

By Wallace Irwin

Author of "*The Love Sonnets of a Hoodlum*,"
"*Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy*," etc.



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21

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Chantecler's Last Chant

A Realistic Study of Agricultural Conditions

SCENE:—A University Farm, the same being pleasantly rustic, but lacking that crude odor of new-laid fertilizer which makes the ordinary farm of commerce so hard to live with. This Farm is under a high state of intellectual cultivation and its master's superior personality is made evident by the tasteful arrangement of a group of farming implements reclining against the pump and reminding us inevitably of Millet's later manner. To the left of the stage a large, dark Mortgage hovers over the landscape, adding a sombre suggestion of Rembrandt to the scene.

At rise of curtain a DUCK, a COW, a CHANTECLER, a HORSE, a BEE, and a GOAT are discovered standing comfortably in such a way that the Mortgage will shelter them from the wind. A LEARNED PIG, somewhat apart from the rest, sits in a Morris chair reading earnestly from a large scientific work.

CHANTECLER

Cock-a-doo-doo!
The light's in the skies,
Phoebus 'gins rise
And life springs anew.
Aurora's bright crew
Rejoice, dew-empearled.
The morning train tooting
And puffing and scooting
Is cityward whirled.
The boss is commuting—
All's well with the world.

THE GOAT

Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a! By the wisdom of the owl
And the watch-dog's dismal howl,
Mr. Chantecler, you sure are quite a literary fowl.
Sir, your crowing is so classic—though I don't know what it
means—
That I'm sure 'twould be accepted by the current magazines.

CHANTECLER

Since on my rare poetic skill you've complimented me,
I'll tell you where I learned the trick—from Arthur Scribner's
Bee.

ALL (*turning to the BEE*)

Is it true he learned from thee,
Mr. Arthur Scribner's Bee?

THE BEE (*buzzing proudly*)

To be the Bee of a Magazine Editor,
What could a sweet-loving bug more desire?
Art is my debtor and Passion my creditor—
My heart and my sting are both loaded with fire.
E'en as New Jersey is famed for its lettuce,
Verdant and crisp when concocted in salads,
So, have I found, is the slope of Hymettus
Fertile with herbage delicious for ballads.
Metres that rippled o'er Tempe's bright gravel,
Dripping with honey I bring from afar——

THE GOAT

Meaning, I reckon, that African travel
Signed with a bullet by Theodore R.

THE BEE (*buzzing angrily*)

Butt if you will this old gray head,
Yet spare, O spare the Contributing Ed.!

(The BEE stings the GOAT, who, startled by this un-
answerable bit of repartee, plunges headforemost into
the LEARNED PIG.)

THE LEARNED PIG

Wee, wee! Excuse my French—my dear Mr. Goat, next time
you see fit to describe an eccentric parabola through the
circumambient ether, would you mind so adjusting your
orbit as to avoid my centre of gravity? You so startled me
that I skipped three paragraphs in the Annual Report of
the American Philosophical Society.

THE COW

What a bright mind the Pig has!

THE LEARNED PIG

My dear Madam, do not congratulate me. Knowledge with me is merely an acquired characteristic. It is natural that I should not be simple like other swine. Do you know whose Pig I am?

ALL

Yes, we know—you are Professor Pupin's Pig.

THE LEARNED PIG

Right in the last analysis. Now, my crude but worthy companions, since you are wantoning your time in profitless leisure, the *otium vitæ*, mistakenly prized by the ancients, permit me to improve your minds and contribute to your culture by telling you the story of my life.

ALL

The Learned Pig is going to tell you the story of his life!

THE LEARNED PIG

O, I was born in Kisco, Mt. Kisco, fair and high.
I spent my early shoathood in Farmer Semple's sty.
In Ceres' airy temple
No kindlier man than Semple
E'er cheered a dying mother pig or dried the orphan's eye.
Forgive me, friends, if my refrain
Now strikes upon a minor strain—
For Semple's pigs they grew so fat he tried in vain to bant 'em—
My brothers perished in a night of cholera infantum.
The Semple pride, all pippin-fed,
Each laid to earth his piggy head
And, toes to heaven, passed away as fast as they could plant 'em.

So in that sickening waste of pork I swore I would not stay.
I quickly packed my pig-skin bag and started right away.
Stealing past good Squire Cowdin's bins
And Dr. Bailey's crop of twins,

Past Seth Low's acres, so reformed you dare not shock the hay,
I took the next Long Island train
And fair Long Island's shores did gain.

And there I saw Squire Godwin's farm of lovely villa sites.
"Oh, here I'd like to live," said I,
Whereat Squire Godwin answered dry,
"If you stay here you'll have to buy!"
Which scared me so I quickly fled this garden of delights.
Too long I might protract this pome
In telling how I sought a home,
How once I stopped at Colgate's farm and lingered there a bit
Until they told me that the boss
Was raising stock at such a loss
He had to run a bank or two to pay the deficit.

THE GOAT

Most 'Varsity Farmers run in debt—
Exceptin', maybe, Ed Burnett
Who spends his time and talent teachin' farmin' to the wealthy.
He'll turn the greenest amateur
Into an expert plough-chauffeur—
Ed says, "Why kick about the cost, so long as you are healthy?"

THE LEARNED PIG (*continuing with the story of his life*)

This twisted little pig's tale that I tell
Is drawing near its waggish little end.
I rooted long, and came at last to dwell
Upon the land of Prof. Pupin, my friend.
He's given me a cosey little shed
Supplied with strange electrical devices;
A Pupin Coil it winds around my bed
While many a wireless wave soft sleep entices.
And all day long my hours I do amuse
Helping my master in his labors tejis,
Writing reports for Technical Reviews
And selling butter to the great St. Regis.

(The PIG prepares to boast in detail of his master's scientific achievements, but his rhapsody is interrupted by a terrified soprano gobble from without. CHANTECLER, at the sound, dusts off his wings, ruffles his pin-feathers,

and goes through all the motions of one preparing to make a great killing among the fair sex. The soprano gobbles grow louder and a beautiful TURKEY HEN rushes hysterically into the barn-yard.)

THE TURKEY HEN

Gobble, gobble! My heart's in my mouth. Gobble!—there!
I swallowed it!

CHANTECLER

Be calm, lady. I'll protect you.

THE TURKEY HEN

Are you capable of defending one so weak as I?

CHANTECLER

Am I? I want you to understand, Madam, that I'm Paul Cravath's rooster. My boss never lost a case. What are you running away from?

THE TURKEY HEN

Three constables and a Pinkerton man have been pursuing me all day. It is Christmas week and no turkey of my obvious charms is safe alone. Hide me!

(At her words all the denizens of the barn-yard, with the notable exception of CHANTECLER, show signs of distrust.)

THE GOAT

Ba-ba, rooster-chick,
Your ways are harem-scarem.
From matrimonial bonds you kick
And add a Turk to your harem!

THE COW

It's a scandal, a disgrace!
It's another Crippen case——

THE HORSE

Leaves his wedded wife and lawful—
These Affinities are awful.

CHANTECLER (*taking the TURKEY HEN chivalrously by a wing*)

Friends, a needless fuss you make
And my motives you mistake.
In my heart is no affection—
She has asked me for protection.
'Tis no yielding to her beauty,
But a manly sense of duty
Sets me trembling like a palsy.

BARN-YARD CHORUS

That's exactly what they *all* say!

THE TURKEY HEN (*slightly offended*)

By my gobble, friends, I swear
That this gallant Chantecler
Is a high and noble gent
With no sinister intent.
He is gentle and Quixotic,
Holding never a thought erotic.
Lend him to me, O, I pray,
To conduct me on my way—
He'll return ere close of day.
Otherwise I would abhor him.

THE GOAT

Take the gallant gent away—
But we won't wait supper for him.

(CHANTECLER and the TURKEY HEN depart in a northerly direction. The denizens of the barn-yard, apparently depressed by this evidence of almost human depravity, huddle together under the Mortgage and indulge in a session of silence. Suddenly from a near-by hen-house comes a triumphant and prolonged cackle.)

THE COW (*in a hushed voice*)

Listen! It is Mrs. Chantecler.

THE GOAT

Poor thing—she has just laid another egg for him!

(The curtain falls mercifully in time to cover the general embarrassment.)

EPILOGUE

Two long weeks have passed away
O'er this scene of 'Varsity Farming.
Chantecler doth still delay
With that Turkey young and charming.
Nightly in the lonely coop
Mrs. Chanty lights the candle.
Daily doth the barn-yard whoop
With this latest poultry scandal.
O whence came that Turkey Hen
To that farm she so divided?
Will poor Chant come back again—
Has he gone and suicided?

Back and forth these questions popped,
Till, joy-riding in a Packard,
Came a constable who stopped
At the farm and nailed this placard
To the gate—"Lost, stole, or stray
Fourteen turkeys, each a gem.
If returned without delay
You'll receive the proper pay
From their owner, J. P. M."



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